

A Portrait of the Traveler as an Old Man

by Gary Ganong

Born and raised on Staten Island, New York, I attended Public School #3 in an old building with one class per grade. I was senior class president at Tottenville High School, which had 1,000 students and was the smallest high school in New York City. I lettered in tennis and was a member of the honor society, but missed being salutatorian at the graduation ceremony in order to report to the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) in June for basic cadet training. During my high school years, I played the organ for church, the piano for Sunday school at the small Princes Bay Reformed Church and was a Boy Scout.

Our family never traveled west of Princeton, NJ, before I went to USAFA. My first plane ride was to Denver and the academy. Two West Point cadets on the plane advised Greg Hildebrandt and me to arrive at USAFA on the last bus. We took their sage advice, which delayed the start of basic training a few hours for us. After basic training, I was assigned to 19th Squadron for four years. My goal was to become an engineer and I took the extra courses to major in Engineering Science. I dated girls from Colorado College in Colorado Springs, and a friend recommended Susan Wiesendanger as blind date for a football game.

We dated for two years and Susan borrowed my unreliable, rusty '53 Ford to drive to practice-teaching. On two successive weekends the radiator and thermostat failed and the old Ford erupted in front of a cadet audience, just as Susan arrived alongside Vandenberg Hall to pick me up. In spite of my old car, we became engaged. Susan's parents felt sorry for their daughter and gave her their '63 Chevy Impala. We sold the Ford for \$50 and kept the Chevy for 36 years. We were married the Saturday after graduation in Union, Missouri.

Our first assignment was for thirteen months for my Master of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Michigan. We enjoyed the Rose Bowl winning football team and the Cazzie Russell-led basketball team which ended up #2 in the NCAA finals. My second assignment was to the Air Force Weapons Laboratory at Kirtland Air Force Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico. We drove into Albuquerque through what I remember as a desolate Tijeras Canyon, thinking how bleak it looked compared to Colorado. Little did we know that we would spend 32 years in Albuquerque and come to love desert landscape and southwest culture.

I had never used digital computers until that point and was attracted to the opportunity to learn how to perform large-scale calculations with computational fluid mechanics codes. The Weapons Laboratory had two Control Data Corporation 6600 computers, the most advanced large-scale machines at that time, each the size of a large room. For four years I performed calculations of nuclear fireballs, atomic clouds and non-ideal air blast phenomena. Susan taught at the Job Corps Center for Women, operated by Packard Bell. Her parents had moved to Tucson and we were able to travel there frequently on weekends.

Colonel Phil Erdle had been my advisor at USAFA and recruited me to teach in the Engineering Mechanics Department. I taught there from 1969 to 1973. Our daughter was born in the USAFA hospital during June Week. We bought our first house in Cragmoor and lived on the same street with four other USAFA instructors. The view of Pikes Peak from our living room was spectacular, as was the morning drive to work through the academy forests. We made life-long friends during this assignment.

A central board selected me for assignment to Colorado State University (CSU) in Fort Collins for my doctorate. By doing some coursework with television tapes at USAFA before assignment to CSU, I was able to complete my degree in two years (1973-1975). Bill Browning preceded me and Tom Kullgren followed me, as we helped our professor complete the research on an Air Force grant for fracture mechanics. Our son was born in the Poudre Valley Memorial Hospital in Fort Collins. We enjoyed our second home with its view of Horsetooth Mountain. It was nice to be a grad student with an Air Force paycheck.

My old friends at the Air Force Weapons Laboratory requested my reassignment there. I returned to the same organization and resumed hydrodynamic calculations of nuclear clouds and blast waves. The nuclear effects portion of the Air Force Weapons Laboratory reorganized regularly and I expanded my responsibilities and involvement into cratering, ground shock, protective structures and nuclear blast simulation and testing.

After five years, I transferred across the base to Test Directorate, Defense Nuclear Agency, enabling our family to remain at Kirtland AFB another four years. Test Directorate was responsible for underground nuclear testing, high explosive simulations and electro-magnetic simulators. I was in charge of the technical directors for each test. Our tests were at Nevada Test Site, White Sands Missile Range and Kirtland AFB. During my last year, I was heavily involved in the nuclear hardness testing of the Hard Mobile Launcher system.

Faced with leaving the work I enjoyed doing, I retired from the Air Force in 1984 and accepted a position at Logicon RDA, working on testing and modeling of nuclear weapon effects. RDA had been acquired by Logicon and consisted of the former Physics Department at the Rand Corporation. When Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers, the Defense Department encouraged the members of the Rand Corporation Physics Department to form a new company, Research and Development Associates (RDA), to protect the nation's nuclear secrets from compromise. Later RDA was acquired by Logicon making its founders millionaires. When I arrived, RDA was a division of Logicon, but the staff contained many famous names in nuclear weapon effects, such as Pete Haas, Hal Brode, Forrest Gilmore, Skip Knowles and John Lewis.

At Logicon RDA, I supported underground nuclear tests, high-explosive tests, shock tubes and small-scale testing. Years later when terrorism became a national concern, the expertise which we and our customer had in nuclear weapon effects was transferred to the problems of biological and chemical hazards. Defense Nuclear Agency evolved to Defense Special Weapons Agency, then to Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Logicon RDA evolved to Logicon and was acquired by Northrop Grumman. Later Northrop Grumman spun off its Science and Engineering Technical Advisors to

avoid conflict of interest issues. The spin-off used the acronym TASC as its name, the well-known name of an earlier acquisition. Later TASC was acquired by the Engility Corporation. Thus I worked for four different companies and never changed my job in 33 years.

Reading has always been a passion in our family. Susan was a member of a woman's book club which met on the last Thursday of every month. One of the husbands, John Beresky, a chiropractor, was envious of the ladies' night out together and asked the wives to invite their husbands to a men's book club which he started on April 29, 1993. Three men showed up at the first meeting: Tom Genoni, Dan Hendricks and myself. We discussed Norman Maclean's "A River Runs Through It," a tour de force. Dan never returned to our new men's book club. I recruited many of my friends and associates, including Mike Blackledge, Ron Bousek, Keith Gilbert, Jack Ferrell, Don Benoist, Ben Smith and John Gilbert Taylor. Don Benoist and Ben Smith have passed away. John Taylor moved to Miami.

Our house in Albuquerque had a spectacular view of the Sandia Mountains, and we loved the friendly neighborhood, climate, and cultures of New Mexico. Our children attended thirteen grades of school in Albuquerque. Susan was very active in parent-teacher organizations. I coached soccer for 11 years for both boys' and girls' teams. The best physical shape I have ever been in was during my last year of coaching soccer when I would play keep-away with the high-school-age boys. Both of our kids participated in science fairs in Albuquerque and at the state level and did well. Our daughter graduated from Colorado College, became teacher qualified and married a cadet from North Carolina in the USAFA chapel. Our son graduated from the University of Denver and Carnegie Mellon, married a girl from Pittsburgh, lives in Portland, Oregon, and works for Intel.

Our son-in-law obtained his masters degree and was assigned to Tullahoma, Tennessee. Other USAFA graduates recruited him to work for Hewlett Packard in Roseville, California. After four years in the Air Force, they made the move and bought a house in nearby Rocklin and began a family. After a few years of taking every opportunity to visit our daughter's family in Rocklin, I suggested to Susan that we move to Rocklin and have time to travel elsewhere. In 2003, we bought a resale in a retirement community with a great view, 2.5 miles from our three grandsons.

Living in a retirement community has encouraged us to get involved in community activities and church. I started a men's book club and run a chess club. Church has kept us busy teaching Sunday school. The previous owners of our home left us with a garden which requires lots of work that I enjoy.

I missed the Last Thursday Book Club after I moved to Rocklin in 2003. Our Springfield Active Senior Community has a Springfield Book Club, which I quickly joined. However, women dominated the club and its book selections. So I organized a Men's Book Club which began its first meeting in April 2004 with a discussion of "*The Old Man and the Sea*." It was easy to form a club since we had a clubhouse and a monthly magazine, the *Springfield News*. Members suggested a

book and we planned only for the next three months. Many of the first few books were about water or ships: "*Ship of Gold in the Deep Blue Sea*," "*Ship of Miracles*," "*A River Runs Through It*," "*Peace Like a River*" and "*The River God*." Eventually we outgrew the need to read about ships and rivers, although a recent selection was the wonderful "*Goodbye to a River*" by John Graves.

At one time, some of our members asked me to exclude women from attending our meetings. This led to our club being dropped from the official clubs and having to go underground. We had last dibs on available meeting locations and had to advertise only by e-mail. We filed a new charter which was non-exclusionary and were welcomed back into the official clubs. Women rarely attend our meetings. They feel out of place although we are courteous and welcoming to every new member. We advertise our Men's Book Club in the array of club brochures in the lobby and have a monthly article which appears in the *Springfield News*. We have 24 members but the most that have attended is 17. During travel seasons, sometimes only six members will show up. Our current format is for the sponsor to read a short biography of the author and then we proceed around the room giving our comments on the book. The meetings last one hour so each member gets about three or four minutes to speak. The meetings end at noon, then half of us go to lunch at a local bistro (everyone is welcome).

On two occasions, our book club hosted poetry symposiums instead of discussing a book. Many members feel uncomfortable discussing poetry and do not attend. Others enjoy it immensely. Any book which pushes members beyond their comfort zone will be poorly received. "*The Sun Also Rises*" was disliked by most members who could not appreciate that it was a cult book in its day. They rejected the characters as unlikable people, unsuitable for a sedate retirement community.

Susan and I have traveled extensively. The incredible sights and different cultures of China, Japan and Turkey have been our favorite trips so far, although we enjoyed driving around Europe on our own when we were younger. I like to thoroughly study the destination prior to a trip and know all about everything I am going to see. We have taken trips with our daughter's family and often shared a condo at the beach for a week. Our favorite area is Monterey-Carmel-Santa Cruz, where there is enough variety to please everyone.

Looking back, I can recall with pleasure my youth, my days at USAFA, and enjoyable careers in the USAF and at Logicon-Northrop Grumman-TASC. I have always been excited about the day's challenges. Now that I am retired, I find that there are too many things that I want to pursue in life. My appetite for new activities is greater than the time available.

We leave behind our legacies of family and community and church activities and successful careers. Raising a family and participating in community activities can be hard work but is very satisfying. We are blessed.
